

International Lenin School

The **International Lenin School** (ILS) was an official training school operated in **Moscow** by the **Communist International** from May 1926 to 1938. The ILS taught both academic courses and practical underground political techniques with a view to developing a core disciplined and reliable **communist** political cadres for assignment in Communist Parties around the world.

1 History

1.1 Establishment

The International Lenin School (ILS) was founded in 1926 as an instrument for the “Bolshevisation” of the Communist International (**Comintern**) and its national sections, following the resolutions of the **5th World Congress of the Comintern**.^[1] The school was established, in the formal language of the Comintern:

“To assist the Comintern sections in raising the qualifications of leading Party workers whose revolutionary experience must be strengthened by general theoretical **Marxist-Leninist** preparation on the one hand; and, on the other, by direct and active study of the organisational and political experiences of the **Russian Communist Party** and of the experiences and current work of the Communist Parties in the capitalist and colonial countries.”^[1]

This goal was to be achieved through an intensive one-year course of study including economics and history, Marxist theory, and the strategy and tactics employed by the world communist movement.^[1] Students for the International Lenin School were hand-picked by the various Communist Parties.^[1]

The first class of students, which began instruction in May 1926, consisted of 70 individuals from around the world.^[2] A matter of major difficulty was the variety of languages spoken by participants, a situation which necessitated the extensive use of translators.^[1] Four languages were used by participants — Russian, German, English, and French.^[3]

Academic courses taught at the ILS during its first year of existence included **Political Economy**, the History of the Russian Communist Party, the History of the World Labor Movement, “Party Construction,” and Russian language.^[3] Instruction was largely based upon intensive

directed reading, followed by individualized discussion with lecturers.^[3] In addition, with a view to making contact with the Soviet **working class**, the inaugural class of ILS students were divided into groups of between 3 and 5 and were sent out to perform manual labor in the Orecho-Zuovo Textile Mill and the Colmna Locomotive and Car Works as part of their educational experience.^[4] About 8 hours per week were spent at such factory labor.^[4]

1.2 Scope

Between May 1926 and its termination in the middle of 1938 the International Lenin School provided academic, practical, and ideological training to some 3,500 communist students from 59 countries.^[5] The great majority of these students hailed from Europe and North America, while another Comintern-affiliated training institution, the **Communist University of the Toilers of the East**, catered to the majority of students from colonial countries.

The greatest number of students at the ILS came from Germany (370), followed by Czechoslovakia (320), with France, Poland, Italy, the United States, and China each supplied between 200 and 225 participants.^[5] Austria provided about 180 students, with Great Britain adding another 150, while Spain and Finland supplied about 135 students each.^[5] Other countries providing more than 60 students included the Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Canada.^[5]

Instruction was conducted by exiled veteran Communists residing in Moscow, including in particular exiles from Germany, Italy, and Hungary, as well as Russian instructors.^[6]

1.3 Curriculum

According to ILS graduate **Joseph Zack Kornfeder**, the ILS included courses on Economics, Philosophy, Politics, Trade Union Organization, Party Organization, Military Organization, and the Agrarian Problem.^[7] Particular attention was paid to study of the History of the **All-Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks)** as well, including the policies, organizational structure, and procedures of that organization.^[6]

At the end of each school semester, students were required to write a paper on a topic chosen by them to demonstrate their mastery of the subject matter.^[6] Suc-

cessful students were to be returned home to assume executive or editorial positions or were placed in the service of the Communist International in other countries.^[6]

1.4 Alumni

Internationally, Lenin School students can be traced as late as the 1960s and beyond exercising significant responsibilities either as heads of communist governments, like Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito, Poland's Władysław Gomułka and the GDR's Erich Honecker, or as leaders of significant oppositional parties elsewhere, such as the general secretaries of the French, Greek and South African communist parties, Waldeck Rochet, Nikolaos Zachariadis and Moses Kotane. Other important students of the Lenin School include such figures as Harry Haywood and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

1.5 Kushnarenkovo school

After the closure of ILS the Comintern operated a cadre school, camouflaged as an agricultural school, in Kushnarenkovo 1941-1943.^{[8][9]} Wolfgang Leonhard described his studies there in his book *Child of the revolution*.^[9]

2 Footnotes

[1] J.T. Murphy, "The First Year of the Lenin School," *Communist International*, vol. 4, no. 14 (Sept. 20, 1927), pg. 267.

[2] Murphy, "The First Year of the Lenin School," pp. 267-268.

[3] Murphy, "The First Year of the Lenin School," pg. 268.

[4] Murphy, "The First Year of the Lenin School," pg. 269.

[5] Julia Köstenberger, "Die Internationale Lenin-Schule (1926-1938)," in Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale: Ein deutsch-russisches Forschungsprojekt*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007; pp. 287.

[6] Albert F. Canwell, et al., *First Report, Un-American Activities in Washington State, 1948*. Olympia, WA: Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, 1948; pg. 462.

[7] Canwell, et al., *First Report, Un-American Activities in Washington State, 1948*, pp. 461-462.

[8] *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*

[9] Wolfgang Leonhard (1959). *Child of the revolution*. H. Regnery.

3 Further reading

- Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, "Stalin's Sausage Machine: British Students at the International Lenin School 1926-37," *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2002), pp. 327-355.
- John Halstead and Barry Mc Loughlin, "British and Irish Students at the International Lenin School, Moscow, 1926-37." *Saothar*, Irish Labour History Society.
- Julia Köstenberger, "Die Internationale Lenin-Schule (1926-1938)," in Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale: Ein deutsch-russisches Forschungsprojekt* [Biographical Handbook on the History of the Communist International: A German-Russian Research Project]. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007; pp. 287-309.

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